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GHOST RIDER™

THE EATER OF SOULS!

FEATURING THE LONG AWAITED RETURN OF ROXANNE SIMPSON!

PART ONE OF THE MOST STUNNING, MOST UNEXPECTED GHOST RIDER SAGA OF ALL!

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SCOTTIE in A Cracker Jack® story
SCOTTIE, THE SCORE IS TIED, TIME HAS RUN OUT, BUT YOU'VE GOT TWO FOUL SHOTS. SHOW 'EM YOUR STUFF.
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GOSH, I'LL TRY COACH.
GULP... HERE GOES.
OH NO... I MISSED.
BOINK!
ONE MORE CHANCE SCOTTIE, YOU CAN DO IT--
YOU'RE A CRACKER JACK!
WHEN YOU'RE REALLY GOOD-THEY CALL YOU CRACKER JACK
SWISH
BASKET
YEA, SCOTTIE!
WE'RE THE CHAMPS!
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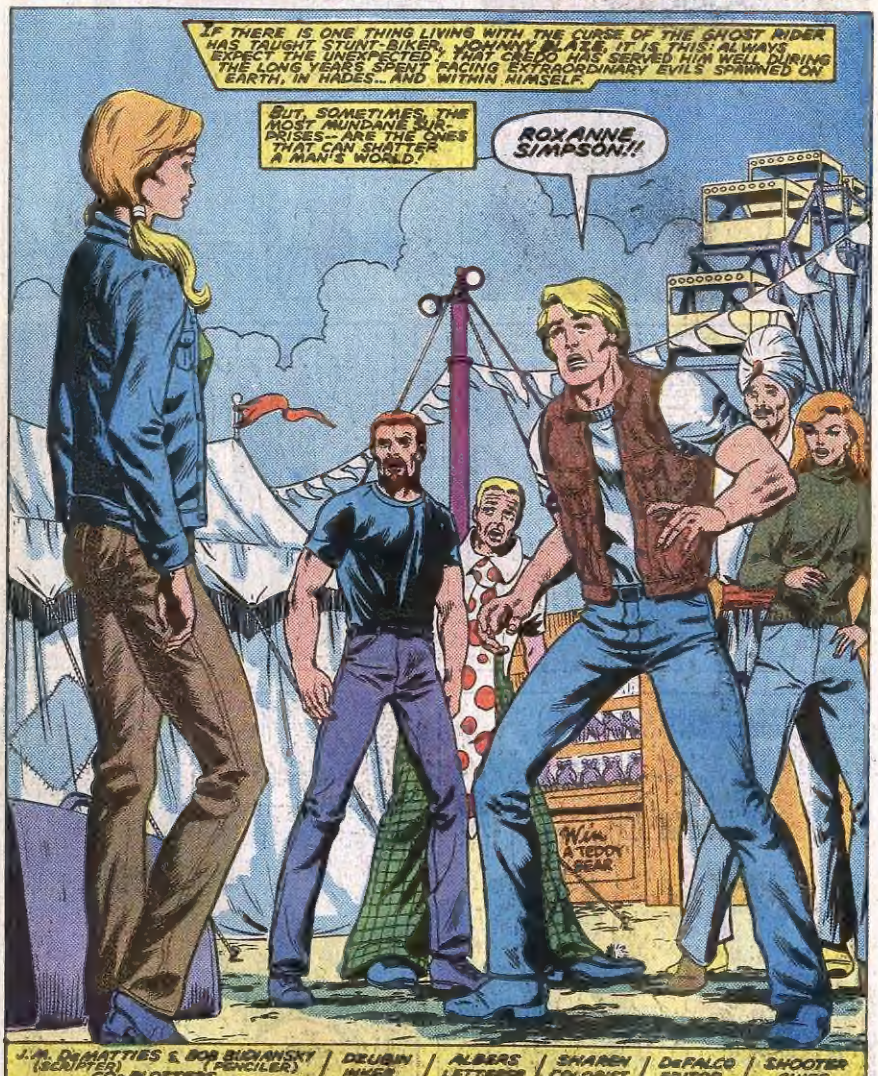
IF THERE IS ONE THING LIVING WITH THE CURSE OF THE GHOST RIDER HAS TAUGHT STUNT-BIKER, JOHNNY BLAZE, IT IS THIS: ALWAYS EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED! THAT CREED HAS SERVED HIM WELL DURING THE LONG YEARS SPENT FACING EXTRAORDINARY EVILS SPAWNED ON EARTH, IN HADES... AND WITHIN HIMSELF.
BUT, SOMETIMES, THE MOST MUNDANE SURPRISES -- ARE THE ONES THAT CAN SHATTER A MAN'S WORLD!
ROXANNE SIMPSON!!
WIN A TEDDY BEAR

J.M. DeMATTEIS & BOB BUDIANSKY (SCRIPTER) (PENCILER) CO-PLOTTERS / DEBUSK INKER / ALBERS LETTERER / SHAREN COLORIST / DePALCO EDITOR / SHOOTER CHIEF

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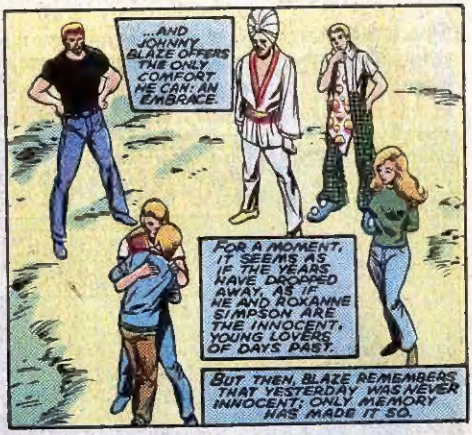
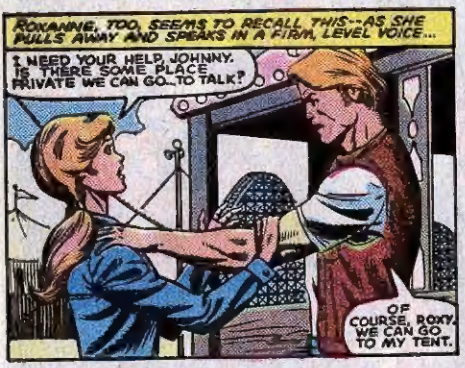
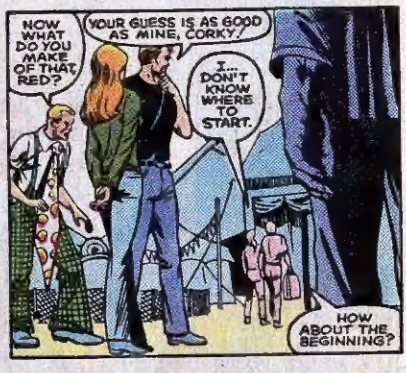
OH, JOHNNY! THANK GOD I'VE FINALLY FOUND YOU! YOU DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'VE BEEN SEARCHING --TRAILING THIS CARNIVAL!
HER VOICE TREMBLES...TEARS MIST HER EYES...


...AND JOHNNY BLAZE OFFERS THE ONLY COMFORT HE CAN: AN EMBRACE.
FOR A MOMENT, IT SEEMS AS IF THE YEARS HAVE DROPPED AWAY, AS IF HE AND ROXANNE SIMPSON ARE THE INNOCENT, YOUNG LOVERS OF DAYS PAST.
BUT THEN, BLAZE REMEMBERS THAT YESTERDAY WAS NEVER INNOCENT; ONLY MEMORY HAS MADE IT SO.


ROXANNE, TOO, SEEMS TO RECALL THIS--AS SHE PULLS AWAY AND SPEAKS IN A FIRM, LEVEL VOICE...
I NEED YOUR HELP, JOHNNY. IS THERE SOME PLACE PRIVATE WE CAN GO...TO TALK?
OF COURSE, ROXY. WE CAN GO TO MY TENT.



"I GUESS THAT WOULD BE IN '64--WHEN YOU RODE OUT OF MY LIFE...WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A GOODBYE." YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT I'D SUFFERED SOME STRANGE, TEMPORARY AMNESIA...AND--MAYBE YOU WOULDN'T HAVE CARED IF YOU HAD KNOWN.
"GR # 26 & ** 28.

"WHEN MY MEMORIES RETURNED, A FEW MONTHS AFTER THAT, I TOOK A GOOD, LONG LOOK AT MYSELF--AND REALIZED THAT I HAD NO REAL LIFE, NO REAL HOME--SINCE MOM AND DAD DIED.
"AND, EVEN THEN, THAT HOME WAS A TRAVELING CYCLE SHOW. I GUESS THAT'S WHY I LEFT THE COAST--AND HEADED FOR THE MIDWEST, WHERE MY MOM'S SISTER, IDA, WAS LIVING.
"IT'S FUNNY. THE FIRST TIME I SET EYES ON THE TOWN OF HOLLY I FELT LIKE I BELONGED THERE.
2

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I, HADN'T SEEN AUNT IDA, UNCLE PAUL, AND MY COUSIN CHARLIE SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL--BUT THEY WELCOMED ME WITH OPEN ARMS. THEY'RE NOT PERFECT PEOPLE... LORD, WHO IS?... BUT THEY CARED--AND CARING WAS WHAT I NEEDED MOST OF ALL.
"BUT THEN--THINGS BEGAN TO SOUR.
"THE TOWN PASTOR WAS ELVIRA GOMEZ, A QUIET, ALMOST TIMID SOUL. THAT'S WHY IT WAS SUCH A SURPRISE WHEN, ONE DAY, HE SEEMED... TRANSFORMED.
"HE STARTED CALLING HIMSELF THE SIN EATER... SWEARING DURING HIS FIERY SERMONS THAT HE WAS EMPOWERED TO DEVOUR ALL THE SINS THAT STAIN THE HUMAN HEART.
"AND, ONE BY ONE, THE PEOPLE OF HOLLY TURNED TO THE SIN EATER, SUBMITTING TO THE ABSOLUTION CEREMONY THAT THEY BELIEVED WOULD FREE THEM FROM EVIL.
"THAT CEREMONY CHANGED THEM, JOHNNY.
SIN NO MORE
"IT WAS NOTHING OBVIOUS: MORE A LOOK IN THE EYE, A SLIGHTLY VAPID SMILE, THE TONE IN A VOICE AS IT IMPLORED YOU TO FOLLOW THE SIN EATER'S PATH."
THEY RADIATED A SENSE OF PEACE AND CONTENTMENT, ALL RIGHT--BUT IT SEEMED MORE HELLISH THAN DIVINE.
WE'VE FACED THE SUPERNATURAL TOGETHER BEFORE, JOHNNY. I WAS THERE THE NIGHT YOU FIRST BECAME THE GHOST RIDER. IF IT WEREN'T FOR ME, MEPHISTO WOULD HAVE SWALLOWED YOU UP THE WAY THE SIN EATER IS SWALLOWING MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY.
I'VE KEPT TRACK OF YOU, JOHNNY. I KNOW THAT THE GHOST RIDER HAS HAD MORE FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE WITH THE OCCULT THAN ANYONE I'VE EVER KNOWN!
THAT'S WHY I NEED YOUR HELP. TOGETHER, WE MAY HAVE A CHANCE OF STOPPING--
ROXANNE--YOU'VE GOT TO UNDERSTAND. SINCE I LAST SAW YOU, THE GHOST RIDER HAS BECOME WILD, UNCONTROLLABLE!
I DON'T WANT EXCUSES, JOHNNY--I WANT HELP.
WILL YOU COME?
O-OF COURSE... I'LL COME.
"BUT, FIRST, THERE'S SOMEONE I HAVE TO TALK TO."
MISTER QUENTIN...? I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT I'LL BE LEAVING FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS.
3

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JUST AS LONG AS YOU TAKE THAT DEMON OF YOURS WITH YOU.
RALPH, PLEASE. I KNOW THAT IT'S HARD FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S INSIDE ME, BUT--
HARD, BLAZE? NOT AS HARD AS YOU MIGHT THINK. SURE, IT WAS A SHOCK FINDING OUT ABOUT YOU FROM FREAKMASTER... AND SEEING THAT FLAMING--THING COME BURSTING OUT OF YOU--
LAST ISSUE.
BUT I'VE LIVED WITH DEMONS, TOO, BLAZE. FEAR. GUILT. GREED. THOSE WERE THE MONSTERS THAT DROVE ME INTO FREAKMASTER'S HANDS... THAT DROVE ME TO USE MY OWN EMPLOYEES... MY OWN FRIENDS... AS IF THEIR LIVES DIDN'T MATTER.
I WAS SO DESPERATE TO SAVE MY CARNIVAL... TO SAVE MY OWN FRIGHTENED BUTT, THAT--
I ONLY HOPE GOD FORGIVES ME--BECAUSE I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO FORGIVE MYSELF.
RALPH, LISTEN TO ME. I--
DON'T TOUCH ME!
IT'S ALL RIGHT, RALPH. THE DEMON'S NOT HERE. NOT NOW.
BUT WHEN HE COMES BACK, JOHNNY--WILL HE BE COMING FOR ME?
I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANY GUARANTEES. ALL I CAN TELL YOU IS--I'LL FIGHT HIM TILL MY DYING BREATH.
I-I KNOW YOU WILL, SON. AND I'M BETTING THAT YOU'LL WIN.
GOOD LUCK TO YOU, JOHNNY. YOUR JOB'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU WHEN YOU GET BACK.
THANK YOU. MORE THAN WORDS CAN SAY.
OH, AND RALPH... ABOUT THE GHOST RIDER...
NOT A WORD, SON. NOT A WORD.

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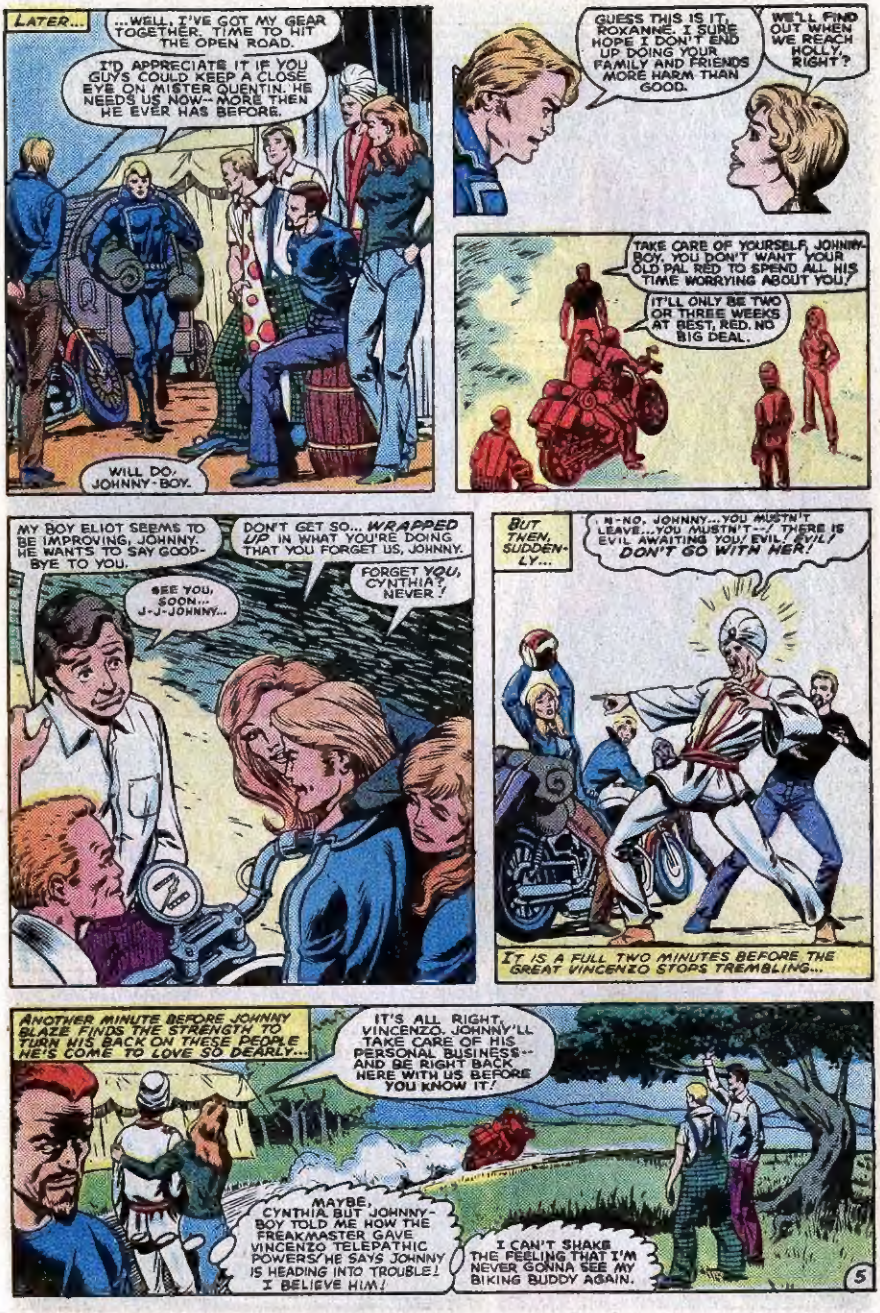
LATER...
...WELL, I'VE GOT MY GEAR TOGETHER. TIME TO HIT THE OPEN ROAD.
I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU GUYS COULD KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON MISTER QUENTIN. HE NEEDS US NOW--MORE THEN HE EVER HAS BEFORE.
WILL DO, JOHNNY-BOY.
GUESS THIS IS IT, ROXANNE. I SURE HOPE I DON'T END UP DOING YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS MORE HARM THAN GOOD.
WE'LL FIND OUT WHEN WE REACH HOLLY, RIGHT?
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, JOHNNY-BOY. YOU DON'T WANT YOUR OLD PAL RED TO SPEND ALL HIS TIME WORRYING ABOUT YOU!
IT'LL ONLY BE TWO OR THREE WEEKS AT BEST, RED. NO BIG DEAL.
MY BOY ELIOT SEEMS TO BE IMPROVING, JOHNNY. HE WANTS TO SAY GOOD-BYE TO YOU.
SEE YOU, SOON... J-J-JOHNNY...
DON'T GET SO... WRAPPED UP IN WHAT YOU'RE DOING THAT YOU FORGET US, JOHNNY.
FORGET YOU, CYNTHIA? NEVER!
BUT 'TWEN, SUDDENLY...
N-NO, JOHNNY... YOU MUSTN'T LEAVE... YOU MUSTN'T--! THERE IS EVIL AWAITING YOU! EVIL, EVIL! DON'T GO WITH HER!
IT IS A FULL TWO MINUTES BEFORE THE GREAT VINCENZO STOPS TREMBLING...
ANOTHER MINUTE BEFORE JOHNNY BLAZE FINDS THE STRENGTH TO TURN HIS BACK ON THESE PEOPLE HE'S COME TO LOVE SO DEARLY...
IT'S ALL RIGHT, VINCENZO. JOHNNY'LL TAKE CARE OF HIS PERSONAL BUSINESS-- AND BE RIGHT BACK HERE WITH US BEFORE YOU KNOW IT!
MAYBE, CYNTHIA, BUT JOHNNY-BOY TOLD ME HOW THE FREAKMASTER GAVE VINCENZO TELEPATHIC POWERS! HE SAYS JOHNNY IS HEADING INTO TROUBLE! I BELIEVE HIM!
I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT I'M NEVER GONNA SEE MY BIKING BUDDY AGAIN.
5

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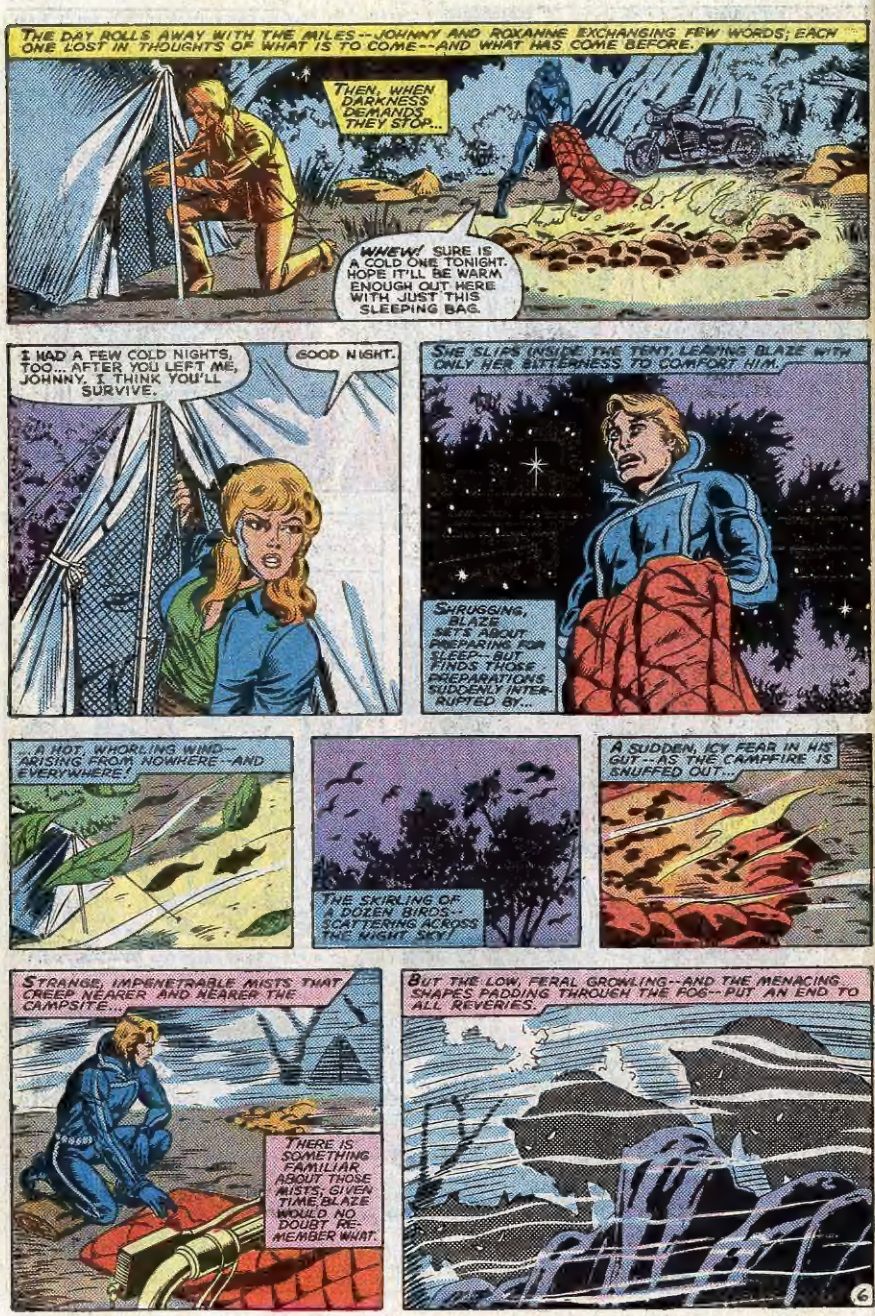
THE DAY ROLLS AWAY WITH THE MILES--JOHNNY AND ROXANNE EXCHANGING FEW WORDS; EACH ONE LOST IN THOUGHTS OF WHAT IS TO COME--AND WHAT HAS COME BEFORE.
THEN, WHEN DARKNESS DEMANDS THEY STOP...
WHEW! SURE IS A COLD ONE TONIGHT. HOPE IT'LL BE WARM ENOUGH OUT HERE WITH JUST THIS SLEEPING BAG.
I HAD A FEW COLD NIGHTS, TOO... AFTER YOU LEFT ME, JOHNNY. I THINK YOU'LL SURVIVE.
GOOD NIGHT.
SHE SLIPS INSIDE THE TENT, LEAVING BLAZE WITH ONLY HER SWEETNESS TO COMFORT HIM.
SHRUGGING, BLAZE SETS ABOUT PREPARING FOR SLEEP--BUT FINDS THOSE PREPARATIONS SUDDENLY INTERRUPTED BY...
...A HOT, WHORLING WIND--ARISING FROM NOWHERE--AND EVERYWHERE!
THE SKIRLING OF A DOZEN BIRDS--SCATTERING ACROSS THE NIGHT SKY!
A SUDDEN, ICY FEAR IN HIS GUT--AS THE CAMPFIRE IS SNUFFED OUT...
STRANGE, IMPENETRABLE MISTS THAT CREEP NEARER AND NEARER THE CAMPSITE...
THERE IS SOMETHING FAMILIAR ABOUT THOSE MISTS; GIVEN TIME, BLAZE WOULD NO DOUBT REMEMBER WHAT.
BUT THE LOW, FERAL GROWLING--AND THE MENACING SHAPES PADDING THROUGH THE FOG--PUT AN END TO ALL REVERIES.
6

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.. AND TO ZARATHOS FREEDOM MEANS VIOLENCE, VENGEANCE
AND HELLFIRE!
THE SHRIEKS OF THESE DIM DAMNED CREATURES AS THE GHOST RIDER'S UNHOLY FLAMES SEAR THEIR SOULS, ARE PATHETIC...
.. THEIR PAINED WHIMPERINGS, AS THEY SCATTER INTO THE WOODS -- THEIR NOW-FRIGHTENED BRETHREN FOLLOWING CLOSE BEHIND IS ENOUGH TO TOUCH ANY HEART NOT DEAD TO SUFFERING
BUT THE DEMON HAS NO HEART, NOT AS WE KNOW HEART.
AND SO, HE CAN ONLY WATCH THE WOLVES' FLIGHT WITH GREAT SATISFACTION...
.. THEN THROW BACK HIS HEAD -- AND LET FLY AN EXULTANT ROAR!
IT HAS BEEN YEARS SINCE ROXANNE SIMPSON HAS STOOD FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE NETHERSPAWN. YEARS SHE SPENDS STUDYING THAT HORNY, FLAME-SCARRED FACE
SHE PRAYS THAT IT WILL BE MORE YEARS STILL -- BEFORE SHE SEES IT AGAIN
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT, WITCH? WHAT?
HE MOVES TOWARD HER, GNARLED HANDS REACHING -- AND HER FEAR WILL NOT PERMIT HER TO MOVE
8

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BUT BEFORE THAT HAND
.. AND THE MAN WITHIN REMEMBERS!
NOT YET
IT IS DUSK FOUR DAYS LATER
WELL JOHNNY WHAT DO YOU THINK?
IT'S WONDERFUL JUST THE KIND OF PLACE I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED
DON'T LET APPEARANCES DECEIVE YOU
THAT'S ME ON THROUGH HOLLY..
..FINALLY PASSING THE BOMBER, TOBIAS AND THE LEGION OF DOMBLUE TENDS HIS FLOCK...
AH, BUT CAN NOT WE DO? PONDER THE WAYS IN WHICH WILLIAMS FOUND THE POWER TO FIND THE STRENGTH IN A WEAK MAN TO BE
IS SUCH A FEAT POSSIBLE? IS THERE, CAN ANY MAN GUARANTEE... REDEMPTION?
OVER THERE, JOHNNY, THAT'S AUNT IDA AND UNCLE PAUL'S PLACE.
THERE IS SOMETHING INVITING ABOUT THIS
.. THE GHOSTS OF INNOCENCE LONG LOST
ROXANNE, DARLING I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE BACK!
HOW DO
A PLEASURE, MISTER WINSLOW
CALL ME PAUL.
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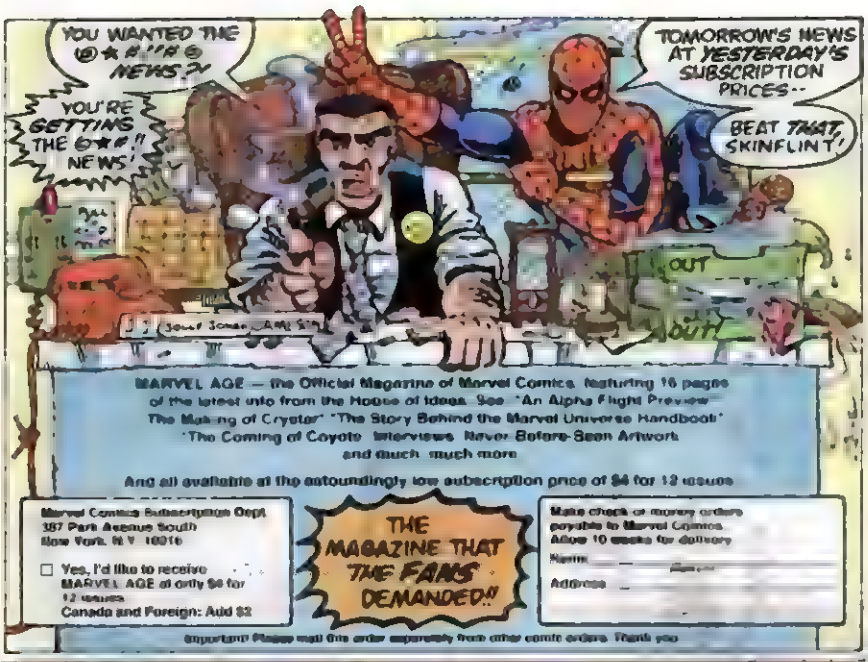

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THEIR WARMTH SEEMS GENUINE. THEIR SMILES, SINCERE. WHY, THEN, DO ROXANNE AND HER COUSIN EXCHANGE FURTIVE, NERVOUS GLANCES?
WHY, THEN, DOES CHARLIE QUICKLY USHER THEM ASIDE?
IN HERE--HURRY!--WHILE THEY'RE GETTING YOUR ROOMS READY!
I'M GLAD YOU'RE BACK, ROXANNE. I'M REALLY SCARED!
IT SEEMS LIKE SIN-EATER'S SWALLOWED UP THE WHOLE TOWN SINCE YOU LEFT!
LOOK, ARE YOU TWO SURE THAT WHAT HE'S DOING IS SO WRONG? WHAT IF HE'S GENUINE? WHAT IF HE REALLY CAN--
COME DOWN TO EARTH, BLAZE. SALVATION DOESN'T COME SO EASY
LATER
I'M SO GLAD YOU'VE DECIDED TO JOIN US FOR DINNER, PASTOR DOMBLUE!
WELL, PAUL--WHEN YOU TOLD ME YOU HAD A VISITOR, I JUST HAD TO COME ON OVER AND EXTEND A WARM WELCOME!
YEAH--I BET YOU CAN'T WAIT TO GET HIM OVER TO SUNDAY SERVICES.. SO YOU CAN SUCK UP HIS MIND LIKE YOU HAVE EVERYBODY ELSE'S!
CHARLIE!
NOW, NOW, PAUL--IT'S THE WAY OF THE YOUNG TO DOUBT. WE HAVE TO EXPECT THAT OF THEM
10

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BUT IF I COULD JUST SIT WITH YOU, CHARLES -- TALK TO YOU -- I KNOW I COULD MAKE YOU SEE WHAT I SEE.
SINCE THE NIGHT I WAS TOUCHED BY TRUTH -- SINCE THE NIGHT... HE CAME TO ME -- I HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED. AND I HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH THE ABILITY TO TRANSFORM OTHERS.
IT'S A GIFT I DON'T TAKE LIGHTLY, CHARLES. A GIFT I AM DUTY-BOUND TO SHARE.
PLEASE, SAY YOU'LL LET ME SHARE IT... WITH YOU.
OKAY, MISTER -- I'M CALLING YOU! RIGHT NOW!
LET'S... HAVE THAT LITTLE TALK.
GET THAT WORRIED LOOK OFF YOUR FACE, ROXANNE. CAN'T YOU SEE HOW PERFECT THIS IS? I'LL FACE THAT SMOOTH-TALKER DOWN, ONE-ON-ONE, AND EXPOSE HIM FOR THE FRAUD HE IS!
BUT, CHARLIE--
BELIEVE ME, COUSIN, IT'S IN THE BAG
CHARLIE WINSLOW IS ONE MONTH SHY OF EIGHTEEN -- AND THERE'S A CERTAIN UNDIMMABLE CONFIDENCE THAT COMES WITH THAT AGE.
...A FEELING THAT THE WORLD IS YOURS TO RESHAPE; TO TRANSFORM.
ROXANNE SIMPSON PRAYS THAT, FOR CHARLIE, IT'S FAR MORE THAN SIMPLY A FEELING.
MIDNIGHT. IDA, PAUL, AND THEIR GUESTS HAVE LONG SINCE GONE TO BED -- BUT REST SEEMS SPENT ON ELUDING JOHNNY BLAZE THIS NIGHT..
MISCREANT! SIN-EATER SHALL DEVOUR YOU!
WHY DO YOU HIDE IN FANTASIES OF A FREEDOM YOU CAN NEVER HAVE?
WHY?!
AND WHY ARE YOU SO DEAD-SET ON WARNING ME, ZARATHOS? COULD IT BE BECAUSE SIN-EATER JUST MIGHT BE ABLE TO FINALLY RID ME OF YOU?
JOHNNY--?
CHARLIE? IS THAT YOU?
I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE STILL AWAKE.
THE VOICE IS DIFFERENT SOMEHOW, BLED OF ALL TENSIONS...
11

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- ALL DOUBTS
I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU THAT THE PASTOR AND I HAD A WONDERFUL TALK. HE MADE EVERYTHING SO CLEAR TO ME, JOHNNY. I CAN SEE HOW STUPID I WAS--
--HOW CHILDISH!
PASTOR DOMBLUE LOVES US, JOHNNY. HE REALLY DOES. HE ONLY WANTS TO HELP. AND HE CAN HELP. THAT'S WHAT'S SO MIRACULOUS: HE REALLY CAN HELP US!
COME TO SERVICES ON SUNDAY. LISTEN TO HIM. LET HIM HELP.
SMILING BEATIFICALLY, CHARLIE TALKS, AND IN THE HALLWAY
CHARLIE?
CHARLIE!!
TURN AWAY FROM ADAM! TURN AWAY... FROM THE DEVIL'S PATH
YOU SAW HIM, JOHNNY! YOU HEARD HIM!
HOW DO YOU BELIEVE ME?!
I... JUST DON'T KNOW YET, ROXANNE. BUT I GUESS I WILL KNOW. COME--
- SUNDAY - AND A CAPACITY CROWD AMBLES INTO THE RECENTLY REMODELED AND REDECORATED FIRST CHURCH OF THE MORTAL REDEEMER -
- WHILE IN A SHADOW-ENROBED BACK ROOM, THE MAN THEY HAVE COME TO ADORE BEFORE KNEELS, IN PRAYER OR OTHER
IS HE COMING THEN?
I HAVE NO DOUBTS THAT HE WILL BE HERE, M-MASTER. BUT, TELL ME WHY IS THIS JOHNNY BLAZE OF SUCH IMPORTANCE TO YOU?
THAT IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN. JUST BE THANKFUL THAT MY DESIRES HAVE HAPPILY INTERSECTED YOURS.
I... I AM HAPPY, MASTER, BEFORE YOU CAME TO ME, NOBODY LISTENED. NOBODY BELIEVED. IT'S A TWISTED, DECADENT WORLD OUT THERE-- AND THE INEFFECTUAL WORDS OF ONE LONE MAN AREN'T ENOUGH TO STEM THE TIDE OF SIN.
BUT YOU, GREAT ONE, HAVE GIVEN ME BETTER WORDS- AND THE POWER TO GRAPPLE WITH EVIL AND TO T TRIUMPH OVER IT!
FOR THAT I SH SHALL BE YOURS FOREVER AND BEYOND FOREVER... F N NEED BE
2

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ONE BY ONE THEY SUBMIT TO SIN-EATER'S TOUCH
ONE BY ONE THEY SPASM... SHRIEK...
AND, ENVELOPED IN AN ELDRITCH GREEN GLOW...
...THEY ARE REBORN!
IF THERE ARE ANY MORE AMONG YOU WHO HAVE HESITATED-- UNCERTAIN AND AFRAID-- NOW IS THE TIME TO COME FORWARD!
"NOW IS THE TIME TO UNBURDEN YOURSELVES!"
BLAZES, YOU IDIOT! I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE THINKING -AND IT IS ABSURD! CAN YOU NOT FEEL THE EVIL AT WORK HERE?
SHUT UP, ZARATHOS! JUST SHUT UP!
MAYBE SIN-EATER IS EVIL - OR MAYBE YOU'RE JUST PLAIN SCARED OF WHAT HE COULD DO TO YOU!
I GUESS THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.
JOHNNY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
TAKING A RISK
JOHNNY-- IN GOD'S NAME--
...DON'T
MMM-PH!E
THAT'S THE WAY, YOUNG MAN! LAY DOWN YOUR WEARY HEAD-- AND PUT YOUR FAITH IN ME!
14

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"OPEN YOUR HEART... SURRENDER YOURSELF TO THE SIN-EATER--
"--AND BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY--"
--YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR--
"--SAVE YOUR OWN INNER--
"--DEMONS?!!!"
AYEEEEE!!!

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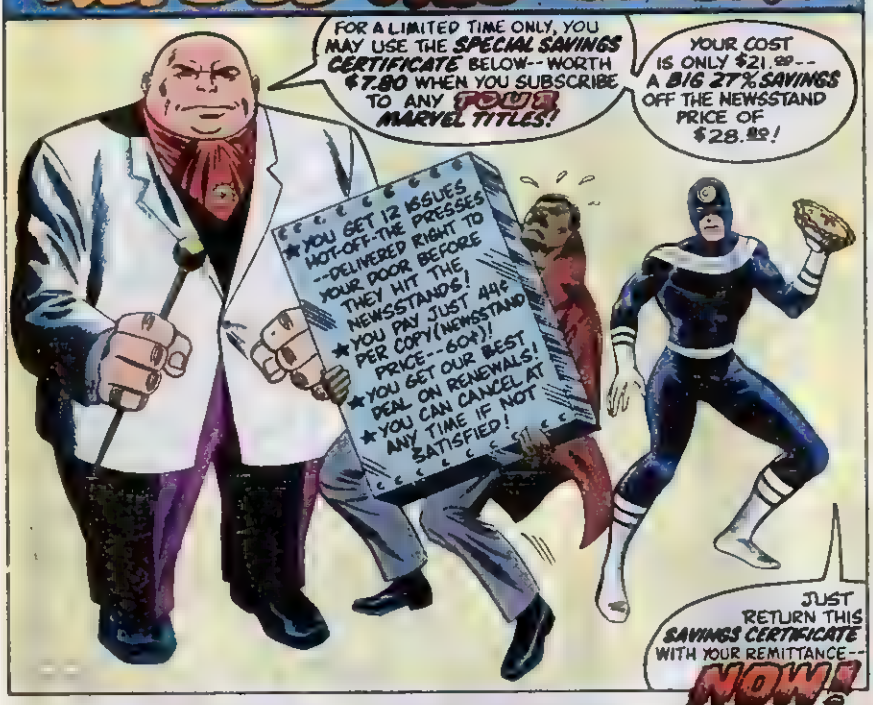
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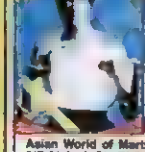

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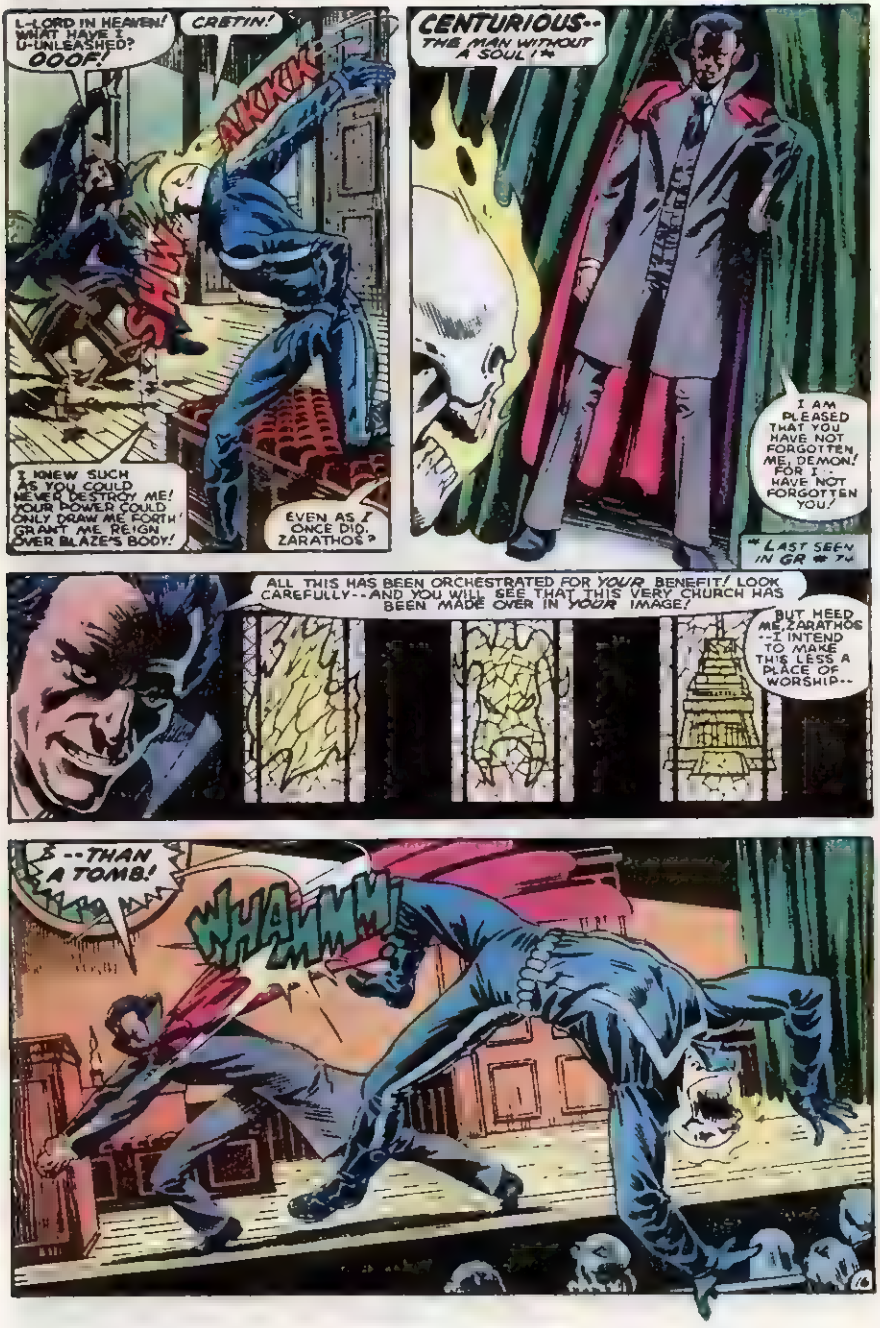
L--LORD IN HEAVEN! WHAT HAVE I U-UNLEASHED? OOOF!
CRETIN!
AKKK
SHW
I KNEW SUCH AS YOU COULD NEVER DESTROY ME! YOUR POWER COULD ONLY DRAW ME FORTH! GRANT ME REIGN OVER BLAZE'S BODY!
EVEN AS I ONCE DID, ZARATHOS?
CENTURIOUS-- THE MAN WITHOUT A SOUL!
I AM PLEASED THAT YOU HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN ME, DEMON! FOR I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN YOU!
LAST SEEN IN GR
ALL THIS HAS BEEN ORCHESTRATED FOR YOUR BENEFIT! LOOK CAREFULLY--AND YOU WILL SEE THAT THIS VERY CHURCH HAS BEEN MADE OVER IN YOUR IMAGE!
BUT HEED ME, ZARATHOS --I INTEND TO MAKE THIS LESS A PLACE OF WORSHIP--
--THAN A TOMB!
WHAMM
16

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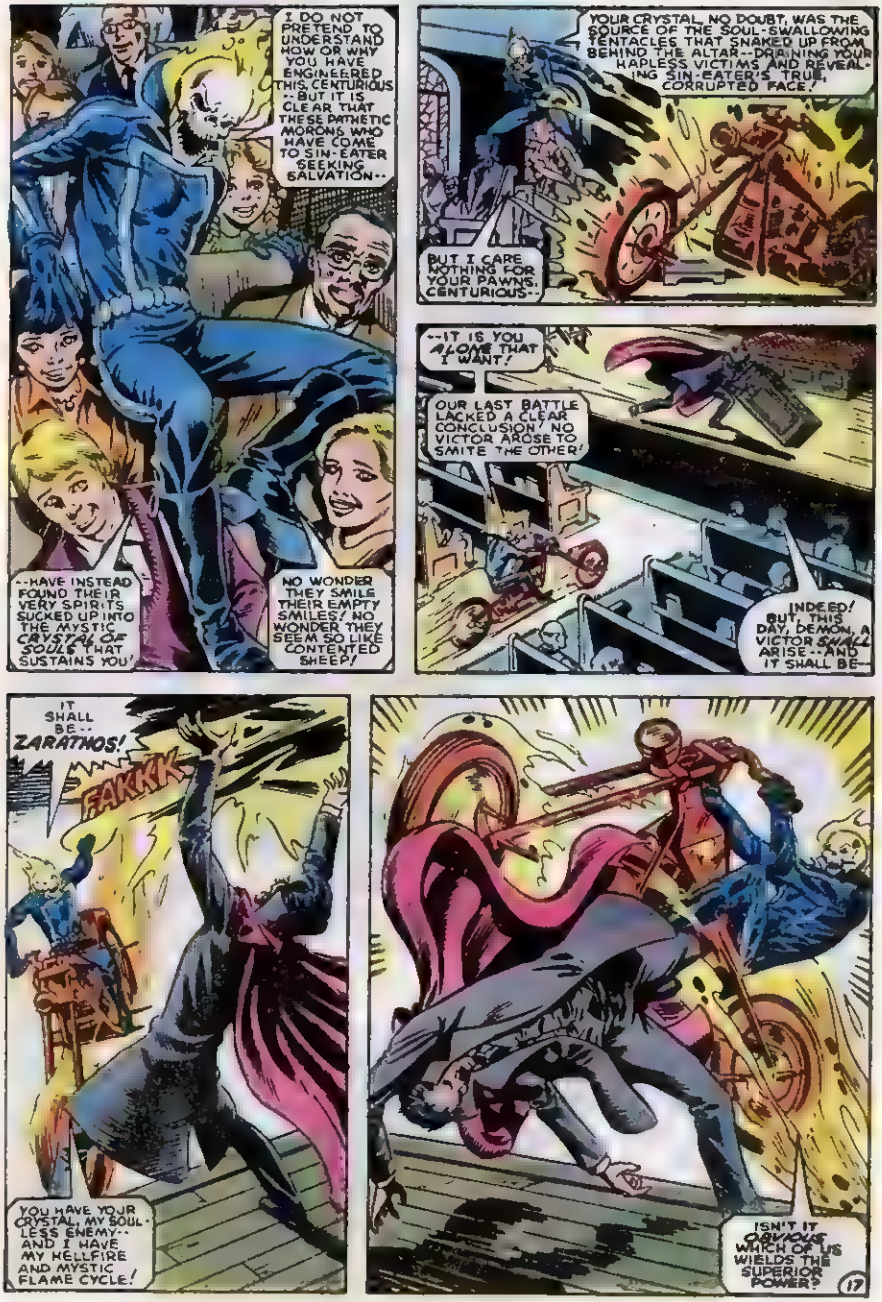
I DO NOT PRETEND TO UNDERSTAND HOW OR WHY YOU HAVE ENGINEERED THIS, CENTURIOUS--BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THESE PATHETIC MORONS WHO HAVE COME TO SIN-EATER SEEKING SALVATION--
--HAVE INSTEAD FOUND THEIR VERY SPIRITS SUCKED UP INTO THE MYSTIC CRYSTAL OF SOULS THAT SUSTAINS YOU!
NO WONDER THEY SMILE! THEIR EMPTY SMILES! NO WONDER THEY SEEM SO LIKE CONTENTED SHEEP!
YOUR CRYSTAL, NO DOUBT, WAS THE SOURCE OF THE SOUL-SWALLOWING TENTACLES THAT SNAKED UP FROM BEHIND THE ALTAR--DRAINING YOUR HAPLESS VICTIMS AND REVEALING SIN-EATER'S TRUE, CORRUPTED FACE!
BUT I CARE NOTHING FOR YOUR PAWNS, CENTURIOUS--
--IT IS YOU ALONE THAT I WANT!
OUR LAST BATTLE LACKED A CLEAR CONCLUSION! NO VICTOR AROSE TO SMITE THE OTHER!
INDEED! BUT THIS DAY, DEMON, A VICTOR SHALL ARISE--AND IT SHALL BE--
IT SHALL BE--ZARATHOS!
FAKKK
YOU HAVE YOUR CRYSTAL, MY SOULLESS ENEMY--AND I HAVE MY HELLFIRE AND MYSTIC FLAME CYCLE!
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS WHICH OF US WIELDS THE SUPERIOR POWER?
17

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"BEHOLD!
KRASSH
"LET THE RAGING TEMPEST BATTER YOU!
"FALL, ZARATHOS!"
"FALL!"
"FALL!"
"O"
YESSSS!!!
THERE IS SHE A WILE IN CENTURIOUS'S CRY, NAKED LOATHING
AND HATE ALL THE MORE FLESH
AN IMMORTAL
ENCOUNTERED BUT ONCE IN A TIMELESS EXISTENCE!
DEMF ZARATHOS GIVEN TO DEEP THINKING HE WOULD NO DOUBT CONSIDER THIS QUESTION AS HE AND
WRESTLING, CLAWING EACH OTHER LIKE ALLEY CATS
WE CANNOT HELP BUT SLIP DOWN INTO
THE NETHER REGIONS OF JOHNNY BLAZE'S PSYCHE, UNTIL...
"U-UH MISTER BLAZE"
19

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..WE MEET AGAIN
NO, NO. DON'T GET UP. YOU'LL WEAR AND I WOULD HATE TO SEE YOU STRAIN YOUR SELF-RESPECTS. THERE'S A STORY I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU--
ONCE I HAVE RETRIEVED MY CRYSTAL SKULL FROM BEHIND THE ALTAR.
A LOVELY TABLEAU. IS IT NOT? THE POOR, TRUSTING PEOPLE, SO TRAPPED & ENTRANCED IN MY EMERALD GLASS. AH, BUT I AM GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF...
"FIRST, YOU MUST KNOW WHO I AM, MISTER BALTHUS. ONCE, UNTOLD AGES PAST, I WAS A GREAT MAN. A GREAT SORCERER. A MAN OF GREAT POWER. THE VERY POWER USED BY THE MIGHTY LORD MEPHISTO TO END ZARATHOS'S REIGN OF TERROR ON EARTH. IT WAS WHAT I DID TO SAVE THE WOMAN I LOVED.
"GHOST RIDER #77
"AND THE PRICE I PAID
"CENTURY AFTER CENTURY, I WANDERED THE WORLD, MY TIES TO HUMANITY GROWING MORE AND MORE TENUOUS.
"I FIRST STUDIED THE ARCANE ARTS IN EGYPT, IN THE DAYS OF THE PHARAOHS AND STOLE THE PRECIOUS CRYSTAL OF SOULS FROM A DOOMED HIGH PRIEST. IN THE IDIOCY OF YOUTH, I DID TO FIND A FRESH SOUL, TO REPLACE MY OWN.
"BUT MEPHISTO SAW TO IT THAT MY OWNER'S SOUL WOULD NOT BE IN THE CRYSTAL LONG. AND SO THE FIEND BESTOWED UPON ME THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY, THAT I MIGHT SUFFER THE LOSS OF EVERYONE I HAD EVER KNOWN.
"BUT THE TOUCH OF THE GHOST RIDER STIRRED SOMETHING DEEP WITHIN ME. THE DIM MEMORY OF AN AWFUL TOUCH I DEEMED FELL WHEN THE EARTH WAS YOUNG."
20
"GR #74

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GHOST WRITERS!

% MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

TOM DeFALCO
EDITOR
ELIOT BROWN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Tom,

CONGRATULATIONS on GHOST RIDER #76!

I have been a loyal reader of GHOST RIDER for a long time now and I can clearly state GR #76 was, in my opinion, the best yet!

At the beginning of the race I thought Blaze would finally be free of the demon (or is it the other way around?) What an ending!!!

One of these days I hope Ghost Rider gets back at Mephisto.

GHOST RIDER #76 was also educational! I never knew ol' GR's name was Zarathos!

The artwork was really great and put you in the mood.

Please, keep up the good work and I'll keep buying GHOST RIDER, deal?

Mike Harper
222 Pine Street
Georgetown, IL 61846

No deals, Mike.

Dear Tom,

I just came back from a convention, where I bought five anthology comics and about 20 regulars. After reading one anthology and seven regulars, I read GHOST RIDER #76.

Fantastic. Whether Johnny and Zarathos would ever gain their freedom was never at issue (have I been reading too many HULK's?), the real fun was in seeing how the two of them related now that they could see each other face to face. These two go beyond the Hulk in that they are both intelligent, aware personalities. The Ghost Rider has been gaining some personality of his own lately and it was nice to see him get a name and home context to go along with it, not to mention that costume he's almost wearing. I was at first disappointed that Zarathos didn't seem to recognize his adversaries or remember sections of the course they had run, but on second thought, this explains his never saying, "Gee, I remember the good old days when I was free to..."

Another initial disappointment was Perlin instead of Budiansky (This is one of the few comics I don't check the credits on before buying), but I was very agreeably surprised. Don, I think this is the best stuff you've ever done, with maybe your first WEREWOLF's and a few recent DEFENDERS pages standing up to it, the story perfectly matched your strengths, doesn't get into any areas where you're weak, the drama is great, the storytelling very, very good and the grasp of character superb. Of course, having Dave Simons do the inks doesn't exactly hurt, either.

A girl asked me a while ago what comics I thought were worth reading. I racked my brains trying to think of a comic that was not only good *that* month, but one that would *still* be good when ever she got around to reading one. The only one that came to mind was DOCTOR STRANGE. Knowing J.M.'s usual track record for sticking to a comic, and knowing Don will take over in case Budiansky goes on to greater glories, I'd feel very safe in recommending GHOST RIDER to her today.

Richmond L. Gardner
15 Edgehill Rd.
Winchester, MA 01890

Thanks, Rich.

Dear Tom,

I was surprised to see the separated Ghost Rider back again in issue #76. The alternate version of this book's titled hero is more superior than the usual version of Johnny Blaze transforming himself into a flaming demon.

For instance, comic book heroes who have double identities are incapable of associating with their alter-egos. The separated Ghost Rider, however, has this capability. In the latest issue, we see the split personalities together in dialogue, and a team in a crisis.

Maybe J.M. DeMatteis can script a limited series on the alternative GR, just to test the popularity with the readers.

Tony Fazzini
420 East 8th Street
Pittsburg, CA 94565

Dear Tom,

I have collected GHOST RIDER since issue #15, and I have a few scattered issues before that, but I have never seen one of them that even came close to issue #76. Seeing Zarathos in his original garb made him look even more powerful that before. His arrogance toward Mephistowas understandable and amusing. I loved it when he destroyed the hell-flame resistant boulder, but there may have been an easier way.

I hated to see Asmodeus destroyed, but with the introduction of Mephisto, I can live with it. I enjoyed seeing Zarathos and Blaze working together for once. I hope to see more of it.

I could tell you how good #76 was for pages more, but instead, I simply ask that you continue to produce such exciting books.

Ted Stratton
8801 N. Gilmore Rd.
Fairfield, OH 45014

Rest assured, that is *just* what I intend to do.

Dear Tom,

I suppose this letter is already too late, but I have to write. I just heard the news that GHOST RIDER will be cancelled. I can't believe it. Just last month I wrote expressing my enthusiasm for the new directions the book is taking, and now it won't be around. Maybe we can see GR show up in THE DEFENDERS (I hope). I just can't believe that after five years the book finally becomes really enjoyable and gets cancelled.

People have asked me why I read GHOST RIDER, since I'm not a biker. No, I'm not a biker, but I am a loner. I am very much like Johnny Blaze. And Johnny Blaze is much like me. I just wish we could go on together.

To comment on #77: very enjoyable. I like the idea of Nightmare in this book, and anxiously await the next issue.

On page seven, panel two, Johnny says that he's now learned that he has more "inner strength" than he's ever realized. That isn't quite true. If you look back at the SPOTLIGHT issues and the first 15 or 20 issues of GR, you'll see that Johnny has felt this power within at other times in his life, and he knows he may end up losing it again.

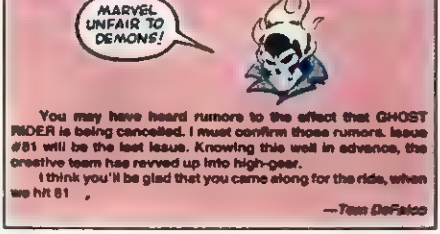
It's especially hard to be content and confident when you're alone. And Johnny is almost constantly alone. Those few friends he has had have betrayed him, left him behind, or (worse) have been left behind. And that makes it so much harder to let more people into his life. Just think of the people from his past: Roxanne Simpson, Karen Page, and the Stuntmaster, that "special friend" who turned out to be the most false friend there could be. That has to hurt more than the Ghost Rider's own hellfire.

I'm really going to miss this book and, mostly, Johnny Blaze.

Tom Stanley
3950 Galley Rd. #6-A
Colo. Springs, CO 80909

Johnny Blaze seems to hit a responsive cord in most of our readers. The inner conflict is a classic theme, but has never been so simply depicted as in GHOST RIDER.

Thanks for your strong support.



You may have heard rumors to the effect that GHOST RIDER is being cancelled. I must confirm those rumors. Issue #81 will be the last issue. Knowing this well in advance, the creative team has revved up into high-gear.

I think you'll be glad that you came along for the ride, when we hit 81.

—Tom DeFalco

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BULLPEN BULLETINS

GOOD MORNING, AFTERNOON, OR EVENING AS THE CASE MAY BE!

Welcome to my *first-ever Interview* in this column. I'm asking questions of the man who has more copies of his work in print than any other human being in the history of the world. Marvel super-pro inker, Vince Colletta.

J.S.: *Let's see... you've been inking since 1950, and you're very fast and prolific, so including international reprints of your comics and your newspaper strip work, I figure that your copies-in-print total goes well into the billions.*

Vince: Yeah... well, I never had a day without work... and I never had to ask for a single one of those jobs.

J.S.: *You know you've made it when editors come to you with jobs.*

Vince: I never let an editor down. I never let a company down. I always give my best work and on time.

J.S.: *Back in the days when Marvel ran polls wherein the readers voted for their favorite writers and artists, you often finished first or second against impressive competition. You must have been doing great work. I always liked your stuff — especially those issues of* Thor *you inked back in the 1960's!*

Vince: Thanks.

J.S.: *Has anyone ever told you that you look like a Mafia don?*

Vince: Back when Stan Lee was doing your job he once printed photos of all the artists in the comics one month. After he saw how my picture came out he called me up and asked me to come back and get another picture taken. He thought I looked too much like a gangster. He didn't want me to scare the kids... or their parents.

J.S.: *Is it true that you know the guy who played Cousin Eddie in* Christmas Vacation *— Peter Falk?*

Vince: I met him back when I had a photography studio besides inking comics. Because I photographed a lot of actors, actresses, and beautiful models for magazines and for their portfolios, I met a lot of people who became famous... like George Maharis, James Farentino.

J.S.: *You're known for your beautiful women, young ones. I mean, everybody says that you're one of the best for young single featuring female characters. I guess photographing all of those models and actresses helped.*

Vince: Yeah.

J.S.: *What's your philosophy about inking?*

Vince: Well, first of all, some inkers like to pick and choose... they'll only do certain jobs over certain penciliers,.. and they'll take their time, no matter what the deadline is, even if the editor is in a jam, or a colorist is waiting for pages to come in so they can earn a living, too. I can't be that way. I like to feel that I'm part of the team, and as we all in the game together. If the editor asks me to ink a story by a young inexperienced penciler who still has some rough edges to his work, I'll do it and I'll do the best I can. It might not come out quite as good as it is that I'd inked over by John Buscema. Even he says he'd rather give it a try to help out the new guy the editor and the team then pick and choose jobs that will make me look good.

J.S.: *It stays how the pencils affect the way the inking comes out.*

Vince: The readers only see the *ink*. All the pencil lines are covered by the inker's inklines. Once the book is printed, no one can tell what the pencil drawings looked like before the inker inked them. They might have given you a lightly rendered face for instance or maybe just an oval shape with smudges about where the eyes and mouth go. If he gives you precise drawing, the finished inked head will look like the penciler's style. If he gives you an oval, you're really getting the inker's drawing.

J.S.: *It's up to the editor to make sure that the pencilers has held up his end. Still, I know that in a story which might have 150 separate panels, even the best pencilers might blow a few panels.*

Vince: I think the inker should locate the problem, and try to make it come through. A lot of inkers these days overpower the pencils, though. The penciler just gives them a framework and the inkers take over from there. That's okay if it's what the penciler and the editor want.

J.S.: *Sometimes it is. Frank Miller worked that way with Klaus Johnson on Daredevil for a while... and Walt Simonson did it with Tom Palmer on Star Wars, too. They really sort of stepped being penciler inker teams and sort of melded together. Unless guys are working on that kind of basis, though, I think I agree with you — the penciler should bear primary responsibility.*

Vince: Right. Since I've never worked with a penciler the way Klaus worked with Frank, I've always tried to enhance the pencils. It's not easy. Pencil drawings often have a life and a charm that can't be captured in the inking. Pencils give an infinite range of grays and tones. An inkline is either there or it's not. Sometimes it's frustrating. There have been times when I've tried to give editors jobs back. I told them, "these pencils are beautiful. Get someone better to ink them!" But, they always insisted that I do them.

J.S.: *Who's your favorite penciler? And inker?*

Vince: I have favorites, but I'd rather not say. Every guy in the business is good in his own way. They're all pros. It's like baseball — not every player can be a Reggie Jackson, but each one has a reason to be here.

J.S.: *You helped a passel of people get started in the business, right?*

Vince: Michael Golden, Bill Sienkiewicz, Danny Bulanadi, Frank Miller, Marshall Rogers... and others. I forget...

J.S.: *Which of yours did you like best?*

Vince: I've inked a lot of stories in thirty-three years. Too many to single one out. But, I'll tell you about the best day in my whole career.

J.S.: *Okay, I'll bite.*

Vince: It was the day I came back to start working at Marvel again after being with another company for a while. I'll never forget the welcome I got here in the Bullpen... it was like coming home. I felt like I'm in the major leagues again. People care here, about each other and about the comics.

J.S.: *You're doing* Thor, Dazzler, *and* Crystar *Plus, since everybody loved your work on* Dark Crystal *over* Bret Blevins' *pencils, you two are doing a Hulk Graphic Novel together, right?*

Vince: Right. I love doing the kind of artful meticulous linework that Bret's pencils call for. I'm looking forward to that.

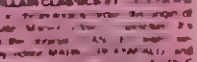
J.S.: *Me, too. Thanks, Vince!*

THAT'S IT!

Till next month when the Bullpen Bulletin returns to its usual non-interview format.

But, if you *like* the idea of reading your favorite Marvel creative peoples' answers to my occasionally intelligent questions, you'll find an interview in just about every edition of *my Bullpen Bulletin Special* which appears in all issues of *Moon Knight*, *Ka-Zar*, and *the Micronauts* which are on sale through subscription or at your local comics specialty shop. If you don't know where the comics shop nearest you is, write to me. I'll let you know.

Stay well.



— Jim Shooter

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CAPTAIN AMERICA #12 — Double-sized *last issue!*

DAZZLER #38

KA-ZAR #30 — Special widescreen presentation

NEW MUTANTS #1

DAREDEVIL #166

DARK CRYSTAL #2

KISS — CONAN #16

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #249

CAPTAIN AMERICA #251

THOR #331

GHOST RIDER #69

MICRONAUTS #42

MOON KNIGHT #31

INDIANA JONES #4

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☐ KULL THE CONQUEROR #1

☐ SUPER VILLAIN CLASSICS #1 — See Hype Box

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☐ AVENGERS #231

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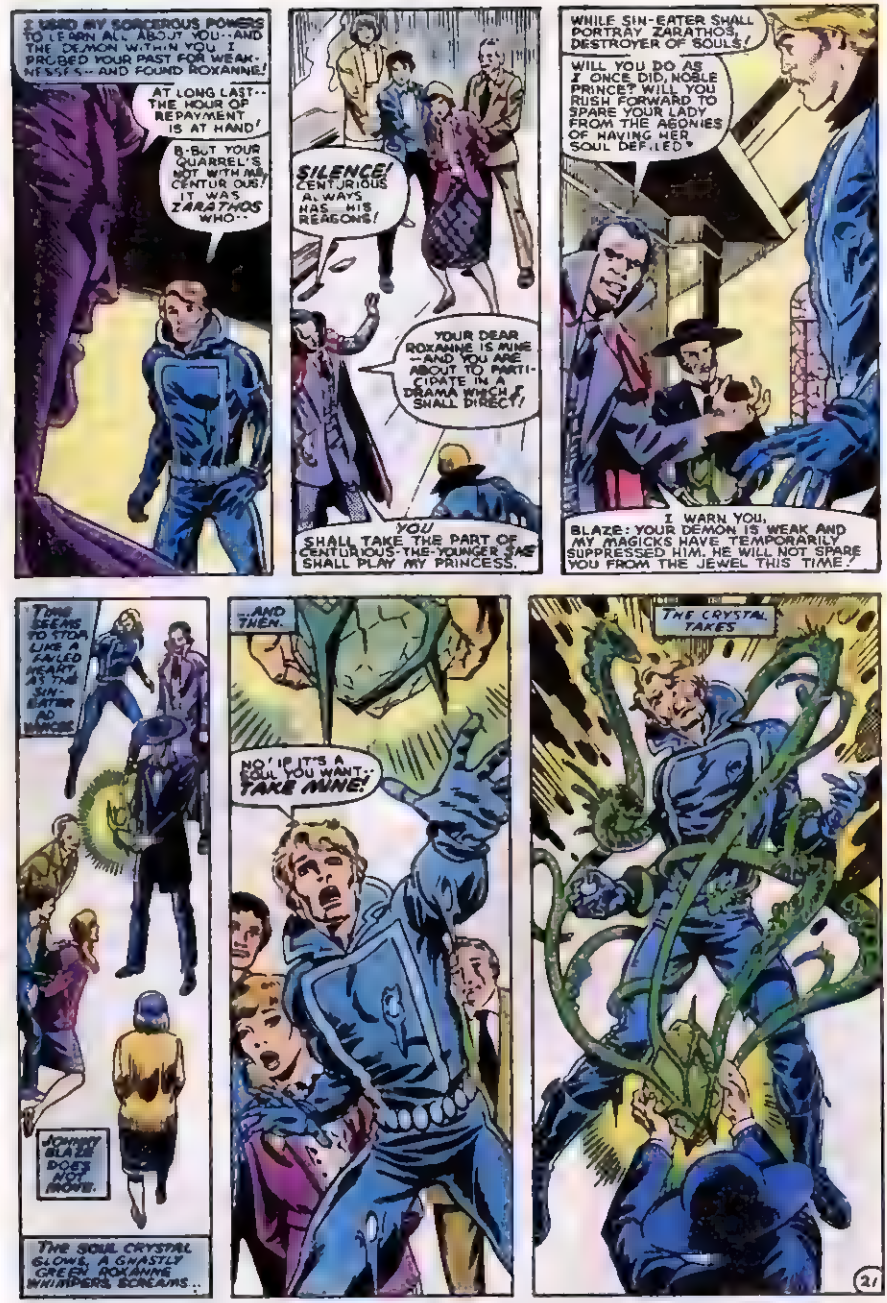
I USED MY SORCEROUS POWERS TO LEARN ALL ABOUT YOU--AND THE DEMON WITHIN YOU. I PROBED YOUR PAST FOR WEAKNESSES--AND FOUND ROXANNE!
AT LONG LAST--THE HOUR OF REPAYMENT IS AT HAND!
B-BUT YOUR QUARREL'S NOT WITH ME, CENTURIOUS! IT WAS ZARATHOS WHO--
SILENCE! CENTURIOUS ALWAYS HAS HIS REASONS!
YOUR DEAR ROXANNE IS MINE --AND YOU ARE ABOUT TO PARTICIPATE IN A DRAMA WHICH I SHALL DIRECT!
YOU SHALL TAKE THE PART OF CENTURIOUS-THE-YOUNGER AND SHALL PLAY MY PRINCESS.
WHILE SIN-EATER SHALL PORTRAY ZARATHOS, DESTROYER OF SOULS!
WILL YOU DO AS I ONCE DID, NOBLE PRINCE? WILL YOU RUSH FORWARD TO SPARE YOUR LADY FROM THE AGONIES OF HAVING HER SOUL DEFILED?
I WARN YOU, BLAZE: YOUR DEMON IS WEAK AND MY MAGICKS HAVE TEMPORARILY SUPPRESSED HIM. HE WILL NOT SPARE YOU FROM THE JEWEL THIS TIME!
TIME SEEMS TO STOP LIKE A FROZEN HEART AS THE SIN-EATER DO WHORE
JOHNNY BLAZE DOES NOT MOVE.
THE SOUL CRYSTAL GLOWS. A GHASTLY GREEN. ROXANNE WHIMPERS, SCREAMS..
...AND THEN.
NO! IF IT'S A SOUL YOU WANT--TAKE MINE!
THE CRYSTAL TAKES
21

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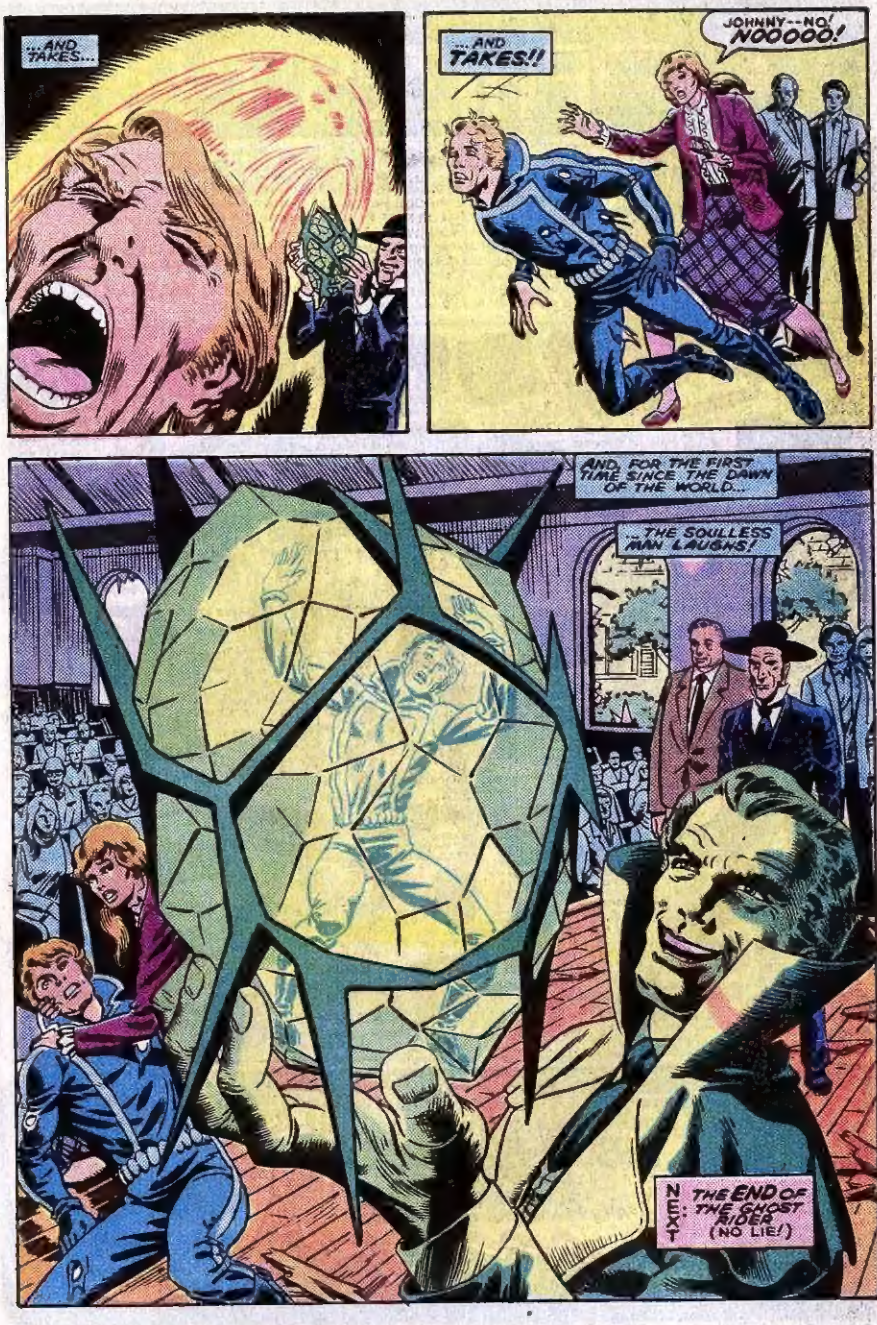
...AND TAKES...
...AND TAKES!!
JOHNNY--NO! NOOOOO!
AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE DAWN OF THE WORLD...
...THE SOULLESS MAN LAUGHS!
NEXT: THE END OF THE GHOST RIDER (NO LIE!)

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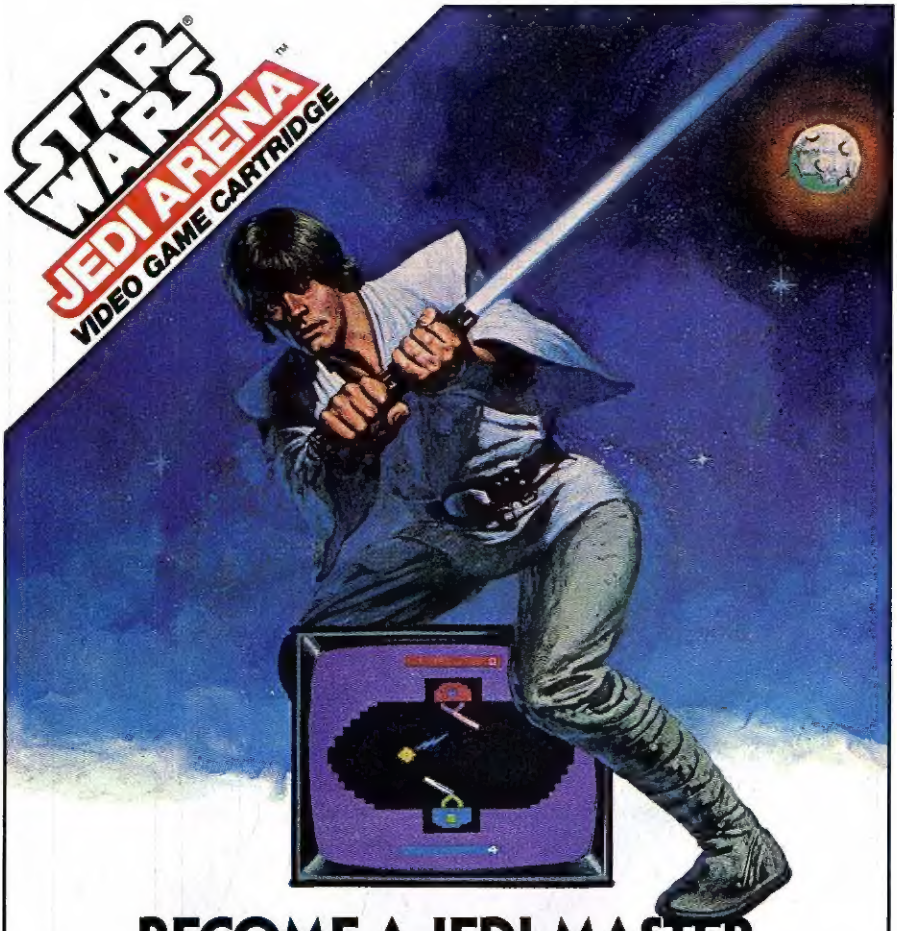

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